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Fact Sheet for the Chairman, Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives

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COMPUTER SYSTEMS

Types and Sources of Department of State Lookout Records

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United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Information Management and
Technology Division

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September 29, 1989

The Honorable Don Edwards
Chairman, Subcommittee on Civil
and Constitutional Rights
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On July 14, 1988, you requested information on the computerized information systems, commonly known as lookout systems, used for processing persons seeking entry into the United States. They include the Department of State's Automated Visa Lookout System (AVLOS), the Immigration and Naturalization Service's National Automated Immigration Lookout System, and the U.S. Customs Service's Treasury Enforcement Communications System II. Generally, these systems are used to help screen out certain persons whose presence in this country would be undesirable and to identify those of interest to other law enforcement agencies.[1]

As agreed with your office, this report addresses the types and sources of AVLOS lookout records. On April 24, 1989, we issued two reports[2] on the types and sources of records for the National Automated Immigration Lookout System and the Treasury Enforcement Communications System II.

AVLOS is a computerized name matching system which checks information entered by State Department officials at consular posts and passport services offices against lookout records on individuals who may be ineligible for or require restrictions on their passports or visas. It also identifies individuals of interest to the State Department and others. The lookout records contain such information as name, place of birth, date of birth, and a code indicating why an individual is of interest. AVLOS provides two distinct data files, one for passports and the other for visas. The files are kept in a computer located in Washington, D.C., and are accessible by terminals worldwide using a telecommunications network.

[1]These systems are generally described in our report entitled Computer Systems: Overview of Federal Systems for Processing Aliens Seeking U.S. Entry (GAO/IMTEC-88-55BR, Sept. 9, 1988).

[2]These reports are for official use only.

In reviewing visa applications, consular post officials use AVLOS lookout records. A consular post official with access to an AVLOS terminal enters applicant data: name, date of birth, and place of birth. The system automatically checks its visa files to see if there is a name match and potential lookout record for the applicant. If the applicant has the same or a similar name as individuals recorded in AVLOS, several matches may occur. The system then automatically ranks the matches according to the likelihood that the applicant is one of the individuals identified in the lookout records. In making this ranking, the system considers other information such as date and place of birth. AVLOS provides the matches to the consular post official to assist in reviewing the application. Certain matches require a consular post to submit the application to the State Department's Visa Services Directorate in Washington, D.C., for review. Common types of activities requiring a Visa Services Directorate review are lookout matches for drug trafficking, espionage, and the illegal transfer of technology. Consular posts without access to AVLOS and consular posts having inoperative systems at the time a search is made use a bimonthly updated microfiche version of the AVLOS data files to review visa applications.

A similar process is used for reviewing passport applications. When a State Department official obtains a passport lookout match on AVLOS, a hold is placed on the passport application at the passport services office or consular post, and the Passport Services Directorate in Washington, D.C., is notified and conducts an analysis. After the analysis, the passport services office or consular post is informed of the application's approval or denial.

State Department officials stated that as of July 1989, AVLOS was being used at 94 of State's 256 consular posts worldwide and at all 14 of its passport services offices. These AVLOS locations process about 75 percent of the visa applications and 85 percent of the passport applications.

The Department is also developing a new system called the Consular Lookout and Support System. This system is intended to improve name matching capabilities (e.g., names using non-Roman alphabets) and process lookout records faster. In July 1989, this new system was being tested at 20 consular posts and 3 passport services offices. State officials said that the transition to this system is expected to be completed within the next year.

According to State Department documents obtained in July 1989, AVLOS has 2.65 million lookout records: about 2.38 million visa lookouts on

aliens and 272,139 passport lookouts on U.S. citizens and aliens. State Department officials estimate that as much as 60 percent of their passport lookouts are for aliens or individuals whose U.S. citizenship is in question. Each lookout record has a code indicating the category used to describe why someone is of interest to the State Department and others.

When the State Department creates a visa lookout record, it assigns a code to the record indicating why an individual is of interest and what action, if any, has been taken. State assigns a refusal code to an individual who is denied a visa, or a corresponding quasi-refusal code if the individual has not applied for a visa, but is known to be ineligible for the same categorical reason. A special code may be assigned indicating that review by the Visa Services Directorate in Washington, D.C., is required. Visa lookouts provided to State from other sources are assigned either a refusal code or the special code. Appendix I gives the number of records in AVLOS for the visa lookout categories. Visa categories generally correspond to those in the Immigration and Nationality Act.[1]

Appendix II identifies the number of records for passport lookout categories, while appendix III is a listing provided by the State Department of sources for visa and passport lookouts. We did not obtain the number of records provided by each source for each visa and passport category because AVLOS does not maintain this information.

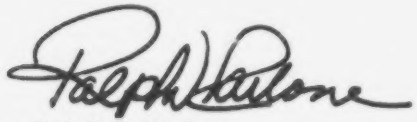
The information contained in this report is based on our (1) analysis of computer generated information from the AVLOS data base; (2) examination of AVLOS manuals and policies; and (3) interviews with responsible officials of the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs, Passport Services Directorate, and Visa Services Directorate. Details of our objectives, scope, and methodology are included in appendix IV.

As part of our review, we discussed the information contained in this report with responsible State Department officials and have incorporated their views where appropriate. This report was prepared under

[1]Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1182

the direction of Howard G. Rhile, Director, General Government Information Systems, who can be reached at (202) 275-3455. Other major contributors are listed in appendix V.

Sincerely yours,



Ralph V. Carlone
Assistant Comptroller General

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Abbreviations

AVLOS	Automated Visa Lookout System
GAO	General Accounting Office
IMTEC	Information Management and Technology Division

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Number of AVLOS Visa Lookout Records as of July 1989

Category	Records
Not a bona-fide nonimmigrant[a]	1,048,846
Anarchists, members or affiliates of any communist party or organization, advocates of world communism	349,848
Submit to State Department's Visa Services Directorate	197,937
Fraud and material misrepresentation	142,510
Crime involving moral turpitude	109,174
Immigrant visa and non-immigrant visa cases under investigation	91,692
Narcotics traffickers and those convicted of narcotics offenses	87,880
Pre-application information at post[b]	85,609
H or L petitions on file[c]	57,132
Nazi war criminals	46,396
Arrested and deported	46,290
Mentally retarded	20,387
Likely public charge (immigrant)[d]	13,726
Prostitution, procuring, and related activities	10,463
Aiding illegal entrant for gain	10,324
Ineligible for citizenship or who departed the United States to avoid service in armed forces	9,545
Lost or invalid passport	8,905
Engage in activities prejudicial to public interest, or endanger welfare, safety, or security of the United States	8,524
Dangerous contagious diseases	6,591
Perform uncertified employment[e]	5,554
Psychopathic personality, sexual deviation, or mental defect	4,048
One or more attacks of insanity	3,511
Former exchange visitors	2,755
Espionage, sabotage, or other subversive activities	2,285
Unqualified refugee	1,991
Drug addicts or alcoholics	1,445
Conviction of two or more offenses and aggregate imprisonment of five years or more	1,223
Insane	1,209
Likely public charge (non-immigrant)	913
Illiterates	505
Excluded and deported[f]	246
Entering the United States to engage in immoral sexual act	121
Physical defect affecting ability to earn a living	65
Polygamists	56
Certain foreign medical graduates[g]	15
Paupers, professional beggars, or vagrants	9
Total Visa Records	**2,377,730**

We have combined records for categories identified in AVLOS by both refusal codes and quasi-refusal codes.

[d]Individuals cannot establish their intent to return to their residence outside the United States.

[f]Category alerts a foreign service post that it has information in its files on an alien applying for a visa.

[g]H petitions are generally for temporary workers of distinguished merit and ability or who perform services unavailable in the United States. L petitions are generally for intracompany management transferees employed by international corporations.

[h]Consular officer has determined that the applicant's earning capacity and resources are likely to put the applicant's family on public assistance.

[i]Immigrant aliens seeking employment in the United States are ineligible to receive visas unless the Department of Labor certifies there are not sufficient workers in the United States.

[j]Individuals denied legal entry to the United States and deported.

[k]Graduates of unaccredited medical schools.

Number of AVLOS Passport Lookout Records as of July 1989

Category	Records
Loss of U.S. citizenship established	86,603
Claim to U.S. citizenship denied as if never established (no fraud suspected)	37,019
Involved in fraudulent or suspected fraudulent activities	34,911
Indebtedness to U.S. government (unpaid repatriation costs or uncollectible check for passport fees)	30,427
Claim to U.S. citizenship doubted as evidence indicates subject did not acquire citizenship or has lost citizenship (no fraud suspected)	20,021
Insufficient evidence of citizenship submitted with passport application	16,096
Parents request notification of passport application prior to issuance, or travel restricted by court order or at request of person(s) having legal custody of minor	12,626
Identities of deceased persons	9,499
Indebtedness to U.S. government (nonpayment of waiver fees or after-hours service fees[a])	7,175
Wanted by a law enforcement agency in connection with criminal activities and proceedings	5,708
Fraudulent claims to U.S. citizenship filed at Hong Kong	5,567
Problem cases involving disposition of previous passports	2,722
Warren Commission category, includes deserters, hijackers, and security agency sources	1,611
Renunciation of U.S. citizenship in U.S. relocation camp during World War II by persons of Japanese origin	667
Catch Card (limited lookout not to exceed 90 days)[b]	619
Potential hijackers	418
Activities abroad may interfere with or are potentially harmful to U.S. relations with foreign governments or security of the United States	402
Potential mental problem cases	23
Attempted renunciants[c]	20
Of interest to security agency	4
Of immediate and vital concern to drug control agency	1
Total Passport Records	**272,139**

[a]Part 22 and Part 53 of Title 22 of the Code of Federal Regulations provide for a fee for waiver of the requirement to enter and depart the United States with a valid passport (under 8 U.S.C. 1185). Part 22 of Title 22 of the Code of Federal Regulations provides that after-hours service fees are assessed when passports are issued outside normal hours unless specifically exempted.

[b]Used to identify cases where early issuance of a passport was required. This lookout is used to prevent the issuance of a second passport based on the original application being processed.

[c]Attempted renunciants are individuals who have attempted to renounce their U.S. citizenship.

AVLOS Record Sources

Sources	Records	
	Passport	Visa
Department of Commerce	X	X
Department of Defense		
Department of the Air Force	X	
Department of the Army	X	
Department of the Navy	X	
U.S. Marine Corps	X	
Department of Energy	X	
Department of Justice		
Offices of U.S. Attorneys	X	
Criminal Division	X	
Office of International Affairs	X	
Office of Special Investigations		X
Drug Enforcement Administration	X	X
Immigration and Naturalization Service	X	X
U.S. Marshals Service	X	X
Department of State	X	X
Department of Transportation		
U.S. Coast Guard	X	
Department of the Treasury		
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms	X	
U.S. Customs Service	X	X
Internal Revenue Service	X	
U.S. Secret Service	X	X
Department of Veterans Affairs	X	
Other federal cabinet-level and independent agencies having law-enforcement powers	X	
Child protection services	X	
Courts	X	
State and local vital statistics bureaus	X	
Private citizens (e.g., parents, grandparents, and legal guardians) and attorneys	X	
Others	X	X

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

On July 14, 1988, the Chairman, Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, House Committee on the Judiciary, requested that we provide information on the computerized information systems, commonly known as lookout systems, used by the Department of State, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the U.S. Customs Service for processing persons seeking entry into the United States. These systems are the State Department's Automated Visa Lookout System, Immigration and Naturalization Service's National Automated Immigration Lookout System, and Custom's Treasury Enforcement Communications System II.

Specifically, we were asked to provide information on each of the three lookout systems in the following five areas:

1. Specific types of records contained in these systems.

2. How the records are generated, including entry standards and supervisory approvals.

3. Controls followed to ensure record validity, timeliness, accuracy, and completeness, including procedures for auditing and purging.

4. The manner in which user agencies (including agencies that post stops on these systems) act upon "hits," including procedures for hit verification, and the source of user agencies' authority to take actions based on data in these systems.

5. Measures to protect the security and confidentiality of data in these systems.

As agreed with the Chairman's office in September 1988, we segmented our evaluation by agency and question. On April 24, 1989, we issued two reports[1] that described the types and sources of records for the National Automated Immigration Lookout System and the Treasury Enforcement Communications System II data bases. This report, as agreed with the Chairman's office, provides information on the types and sources of lookout records in the Department of State's AVLOS.

In preparing this report, our objective was to obtain information on the types and sources of records contained in the AVLOS lookout data base.

[1]These reports are for official use only.

Our work focused on categorizing these lookout records according to the reason for the lookout.

To accomplish this objective, we examined AVLOS manuals and policies and discussed these documents with agency officials. We interviewed responsible officials of Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs, Passport Services Directorate, and Visa Services Directorate in Washington, D.C., and discussed the types and sources of AVLOS records, and how to categorize them.

We also obtained a breakout of the AVLOS data base as of July 1989. From this breakout, we grouped and totalled the lookout records by categories obtained from the State Department's instructions on the system.

Views of responsible agency officials on the material contained in this report were obtained and incorporated where appropriate. Our work was performed from May 1989 through August 1989 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Major Contributors to This Report

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